

Two


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Tipping the ESL Scales into the mainstream

Can the ESL Scales be given currency in classrooms by integrating the outcomes and pointers into class programs?

Having used the ESL Scales for a few years, I have been exploring ways to encourage class teachers at our school to utilise the outcomes and pointers to support the language learning of the ESL students in their classes. I am constantly frustrated by the limited time I get to spend with ESL students face to face and would like to see ESL practices utilised in classrooms in a more consistent, deliberate way.

As an outcomes-based approach to teaching and assessing becomes more prevalent, the ESL Scales provide a useful tool to raise the achievement of ESL students. I was interested in investigating whether the main features of the ESL Scales could be integrated into core grade units and not be left exclusively in ESL hands.



Appendices

- 2.1 ESL Student Profile
- 2.2 ESL Student Writing Outcomes
- 2.3 Student Achievement on ESL Scales - Writing
- 2.4 Information Report Writing - Year 2
- 2.5 Information Report Writing - Year 4
- 2.6 Information Report Writing - Stage 1

Context

The day began like any other. A quick cup of coffee, journals collected for marking, a hasty look at the memo board to check for interruptions to the school timetable and I was almost ready to start another hectic schedule.

A colleague rushed in to steal a few minutes for an impromptu consultation and negotiated last-minute changes to team teaching arrangements. The morning bell summoned him to assembly and he rushed off, leaving me contemplating the progress of our ESL team over the past two to three years.

This way of planning and programming was a typical feature of my day given the number of classes and restricted timeframe. I often questioned the impact of the support I offered my students, especially in relation to their class curriculum. Was ESL only happening when I was physically in the classrooms?

My eyes drifted to the ESL Scales document lying open on the table. This battered, well-thumbed document, sporting makeshift index tabs and glowing with random strips of yellow highlighter had for some time provided a framework for most of the decisions and planning for my withdrawal groups. However, I was consistently disappointed in my attempts to 'tip the ESL Scales into the regular classes'.

Carlingford West Public School is located in the north-west of Sydney, between Parramatta and Epping. Most residents own their own homes and many are academics or in business. The school has a total enrolment of 638 students with 52 percent from language backgrounds other than English. There are 33 different languages represented. The dominant cultural group is Cantonese speaking Chinese. There are 24 classes with ESL students distributed, on merit, throughout all classes. Years 3-6 have an 'A' graded class and two parallel classes. We have a steady stream of ESL new arrivals each term.

Parents deem academic success as the ultimate goal of schooling and their expectations are very high. Most parents can either read English or have the support of an English speaking relative to help them access the information sent home so the need for translations and interpreters is limited to only a few families. The school has used very traditional practices and the move to outcomes-based planning and assessment has been slow. Over one third of the Year 6 students gain entry to selective high schools each year. This is the goal of many of our ESL students. Our school policies have broader goals.

In 1997 we had 1.8 ESL teaching positions, 1.6 Mandarin Community Language teachers and 0.4 Support Teacher Learning Assistance (STLA) support.

The ESL teachers have total responsibility for making decisions about the organisation of the ESL allocation; all decisions are made on a needs basis. The current system of organisation allows us to work with the same group of students as they progress through the grades, getting to know the students' needs very well. In addition to my grade responsibilities, I deal with all ESL New Arrivals.

All grades have a mixture of ESL withdrawal and team teaching, although the latter is generally only one session per week. Co-operative planning between ESL and class teachers operates in some grades. To date the inclusion of the ESL Scales has been almost non-existent.

Each week I spend a full session team teaching in seven classrooms and make the ESL resource centre available to students in two other classes as required. I deal with all new arrivals and 'at risk' Phase 2 students in groups every day.

The school acknowledges second language acquisition principles and the contribution of the first language to the English learning process and student well being. Most staff members attended the *ESL in the Mainstream* workshops. The ESL teachers have specialist ESL training and have been trained in the use of the ESL Scales. I am an ESL Scales facilitator.

Traditional methods of assessment are slowly making way for outcomes and profiles. Marks and testing are highly prized by parents.

How I began

My association with the *ESL Scales* document began three years ago when I became a presenter for the ESL Scales implementation modules. This forced me to examine and understand the ESL Scales in depth as I was expected to discuss aspects with participants during the workshops.

I realised that within its pages there was a continuum of language development outlined in practical terms, which could help me to track and monitor students' language learning achievements. All that remained was to find the means to put this into practice in the school program.

My ESL colleague and I agreed that using the continuum to track student achievement would involve assessing students' language acquisition and matching this to the appropriate levels of the ESL Scales. We knew that this would take time and organisation and, above all, would need to be a legitimate and manageable part of lesson activities. We started with a small group of students in ESL withdrawal lessons and intended to use the process in our team teaching.

We began by incorporating a number of assessment activities into our existing programs and used the observations and results to begin benchmarking a small group of students.

I selected four students in Year 2 and monitored their work over the next four weeks. I collected samples of their writing, made running records of their reading and observed their spoken English. I taped segments of some lessons and played these back to the students in the course of the lesson to get their reactions and feedback. This particular activity resulted in an unexpected bonus. The students really enjoyed hearing themselves on the tapes and became quite good at recognising pronunciation and grammatical errors in their own speech. They have since become quite comfortable with the incidental use of the tape and it is now a regular part of my program.

I found the practice of taping for later assessment was extremely time consuming; I now only use this practice for students with particular difficulties or for new arrivals.

After three months I was confident of the consistency of the data and interpretation of the levels so I began recording information on a proforma developed by Lynys Nelson at Auburn West Public School (**Appendix 2.1**).

As ongoing assessment was now a regular part of my lessons I looked more critically at my programming. I examined the teaching and learning activities so as to target activities that could be used for formative assessment purposes. I found I could use the pointers to build progressive learning and assessment activities into my program. This resulted in a sequenced plan of action to support the students' English language development.

In each lesson I focused on a particular aspect, such as using articles or retelling events in order, and then tried to match the students' achievement levels to those outlined in the ESL Scales.

There were some problems in documenting the outcomes in my withdrawal program. I seemed to be repeatedly writing up the same lengthy expectations each week. Since the outcomes often spanned a term or longer I designed a general 'outcome overview' sheet showing the outcomes from three levels aligned together on the one page. This enabled me to select outcomes relevant to the units I was teaching from a range across three levels, by highlighting the appropriate outcomes. I passed this sheet on to class teachers of the ESL students in my withdrawal classes together with a copy of my program. They were happy to add these to their programs but no questions or feedback followed. The ESL Scales were still 'ESL business!'

Student files

By the end of the year I had placed 20 withdrawal students on appropriate ESL Scales levels and was consistently programming for these groups in terms of ESL outcomes. The data collected was organised for easy access into a student file which included:

- a copy of the student Oasis enrolment printout
- a profile sheet on student background and ESL Scales outcomes achieved (**Appendix 2.1**)
- anecdotal observations.

A large envelope attached to the back housed-annotated writing samples, worksheets and journal entries.

Paramount to the success of this strategy was the principle of keeping practices manageable in terms of time and effort.

The problem

So far so good, but the data was still exclusively ESL-owned and I was struggling to push the information into the mainstream arena. This was not because class teachers were resisting but more a case of there not being a simple method of sharing the advantages of the ESL Scales with all teachers. I felt that the students' English was only developing in the ESL classes, that I was not providing a practical scaffold for continued development in mainstream classes. This was in spite of the fact that lots of supportive practices were evident in teacher programs. It seemed that the teachers were very well aware of the ESL students' progress in relation to the content but not very well informed of their English language development.

Could the ESL Scales supplement and support the language aspects of class programs across KLA's without having to be a separate add-on program? Surely all ESL students could benefit from the integration of the ESL Scales into classroom programming and assessing. It seemed that the range of ESL Scales levels I had noted in my small group was no different from the range of abilities in any given classroom, but how was I going to tip the ESL Scales into the mainstream? My colleague and I decided to try selling the ESL Scales to the staff.

Selling the ESL Scales to the staff

We presented an overview of the ESL Scales at a staff meeting. Teachers were given cards with outcomes written on them and asked to sequence them in terms of English language progression and to try to justify their choices. We then ranked the outcomes on an overhead transparency (**Appendix 2.2**) and traced the language describing the skills from one level to another to show the progression. Much discussion took place.

We then compared the outcome levels of two ESL students in the same year who had begun learning English on entering the school system. Using overhead transparencies of each student's achievements, we overlaid them to show the differences and specific gaps in their language development.

An interesting discussion followed on the differing needs of the two students and possible planning to address their needs. Copies of the Department's *English K-6 Teaching Units* which refer to the ESL Scales were circulated and received very positively. We gave each teacher a manila folder containing copies of all overheads used in the presentation and some information on the ESL Scales. We also included descriptions of communicative activities and discussed the advantages of using these to support and assess students' English language development within the framework of the class program.

Following this presentation I documented fully the language achievements of one of the Year 2 students profiled in the staff meeting in a report which I gave to the class teacher for feedback. Although very positive about it, we both agreed that such detailed reports would involve too much time for a large number of students on a regular basis.

Based on an idea suggested at an ESL network meeting, I compiled a list of ESL students in a team taught class by grouping them into the ESL Scales levels they were working in and gave the list to class teachers (**Appendix 2.3**). Accompanying this were sheets showing the outcomes and pointers for these levels. Since the pointers can be divided into those that are 'teachable' and those 'observable', I highlighted the teachable pointers to provide specific skills for the class teacher to work with. This was a successful step forward. I now use these sheets at every consultation with class teachers and update them as needed.

This strategy gave the class teachers an opportunity to access part of the *ESL Scales* document in a very purposeful way. However there was still no evidence of ESL students being assessed in terms of ESL Scales outcomes.

Assessing ESL student achievement

Our school was in the very early stages of moving to outcomes based assessment. To date, traditional methods of testing have been the norm with parents receiving a formal report twice a year. Parents of ESL students in withdrawal programs received an additional ESL report referring to the ESL Scales, with appropriate pointers paraphrased for easier comprehension. This meant a lot of work but it provided a detailed summary of student achievement. This always proved very useful for the ESL staff but the data remained in ESL hands.

In order to work more as a whole school team, the ESL staff needed direct input into teaching units and practices already in place.

A portfolio-style scrapbook showcasing samples of student work, was trialled during the year in Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2. ESL input was encouraged but we were reluctant to just add an 'ESL piece of work'. I wanted to convey to parents and class teachers that learning English as a second language is an integral part of the complete curriculum, not a tag on. My team teaching in Year 2 classes offered an opportunity to do this.

I had co-operatively programmed a sequence of lessons to scaffold ESL students' language learning as they worked towards the final outcome of independently writing a report on an Australian animal. Communicative activities and language support practices were written into the existing program and used in lessons. I enjoyed equal status in the classroom and recognised the potential for joint, formative assessment.

I decided to explore the possibilities of producing an assessment sheet which combined the English K-6 syllabus outcomes and the ESL Scales. Working collaboratively over lunch with a keen class teacher, we selected the K-6 outcomes that mirrored our joint expectations of achievement for the majority of the class in writing an information report.

The initial task was to choose one level from English K–6 as a manageable starting point and plan to modify later to accommodate those students working towards the levels at either side. Next, we added the ESL Scales level common to the majority of ESL students. Together we designed appropriate pointers to describe achievement of aspects relevant to the information report text type.

We merged English K–6 and ESL pointers and added some of our own to form a common list. This would address the needs of all students and provide a norm against which parents could measure their own child's achievements. We tried to focus parent attention on what their child could do and not focus on skills not being achieved.

A proforma (**Appendix 2.4**) was developed and included most elements needed for both programming and assessing. To allow some student input into the assessment procedure we provided a key for students to indicate their own opinion of their achievements. Students could show whether they felt they were achieving the pointers independently (R) or with help (B).

Teacher assessment would be indicated with D for Developing skill or M for Mastered skill. The outcomes were paraphrased in language that students and parents could understand, that is, student performance, e.g. 'I can write words that other people can read' or 'I know that writing is important at school'.

I hoped that other teachers in Year 2 would be inspired to take these ideas on board themselves as I did not intend to personally produce proformas like this for every text type.

The ESL team then decided to approach the teachers working in the grades above and below Year 2 to collaborate on developing similar assessment proformas. This would show the development and extension across the grades in the form of a continuum.

This proved a very useful exercise as there was nothing documented in the school writing program to show the progressive development of information report writing or any other text type. Student achievement, in terms of expectations, seemed to be very similar for Years 2 and 4 and hence it became necessary to exemplify expectations for specific linguistic aspects. For example, if students in Year 2 were using connectives such as *'because'* and *'and'*, then by Year 4 they should be attempting to use *'since'* and *'so that'*.

The school now had a series of assessment proformas (**Appendices 2.4, 2.5, 2.6**) that moved deliberately across three levels of achievement in writing information reports. This also provided an outline of the key points needed for programming.

Current impact

The assessment proformas were trialled by all three Year 2 classes. The students attempted self-assessment but required extensive help in reading and understanding the pointers. This was a little too difficult for some but students could record their opinions on their learning quite honestly. The proforma was included in the profile sent home to parents at the end of Term 3.

The student input was more successful in Year 4. These students still needed the teacher to talk them through the pointers, however, considering the concept of self assessment is very new, the results were very good.

Our efforts in producing these assessment proformas have had an impact on the direction being taken by the school Assessment and Reporting Committee on how writing is assessed. Some teachers have reconsidered their ideas on how to address the teaching of text types. While everyone would be quick to say that we provide a continuum of development across the grades, this exercise indicated that it was not really happening very effectively. Attention is now being given to a more specific approach, rather than relying on general pointers.

A staff meeting has been organised to specifically address the compilation of a continuum of writing outcomes and pointers across the grades.

The inclusion of ESL teaching notes and ESL Scales levels in the English K-6 syllabus has given the ESL Scales more currency than in other KLAs.

Conclusion

It is easier to apply the ESL Scales in classrooms where teaching programs are outcomes based. This can assist class teachers to understand the needs of ESL learners and how to address them. Some ESL students who appear to be quite adequately described on the K-6 English levels can still have significant, specific English language development needs. The ESL Scales provide that support and provide a continuum for developing specific skills and English language as a whole.

ESL STUDENT PROFILE

Date _____	
Primary school _____	
Student's family name _____	
Given name(s) _____	
Country of origin _____	
Language(s) spoken at home _____	
Date of arrival in Australia _____	Date of enrolment _____
Previous schooling _____	

SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA — Tick appropriate years

K	1	2	3	4	5	6
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ESL PHASE

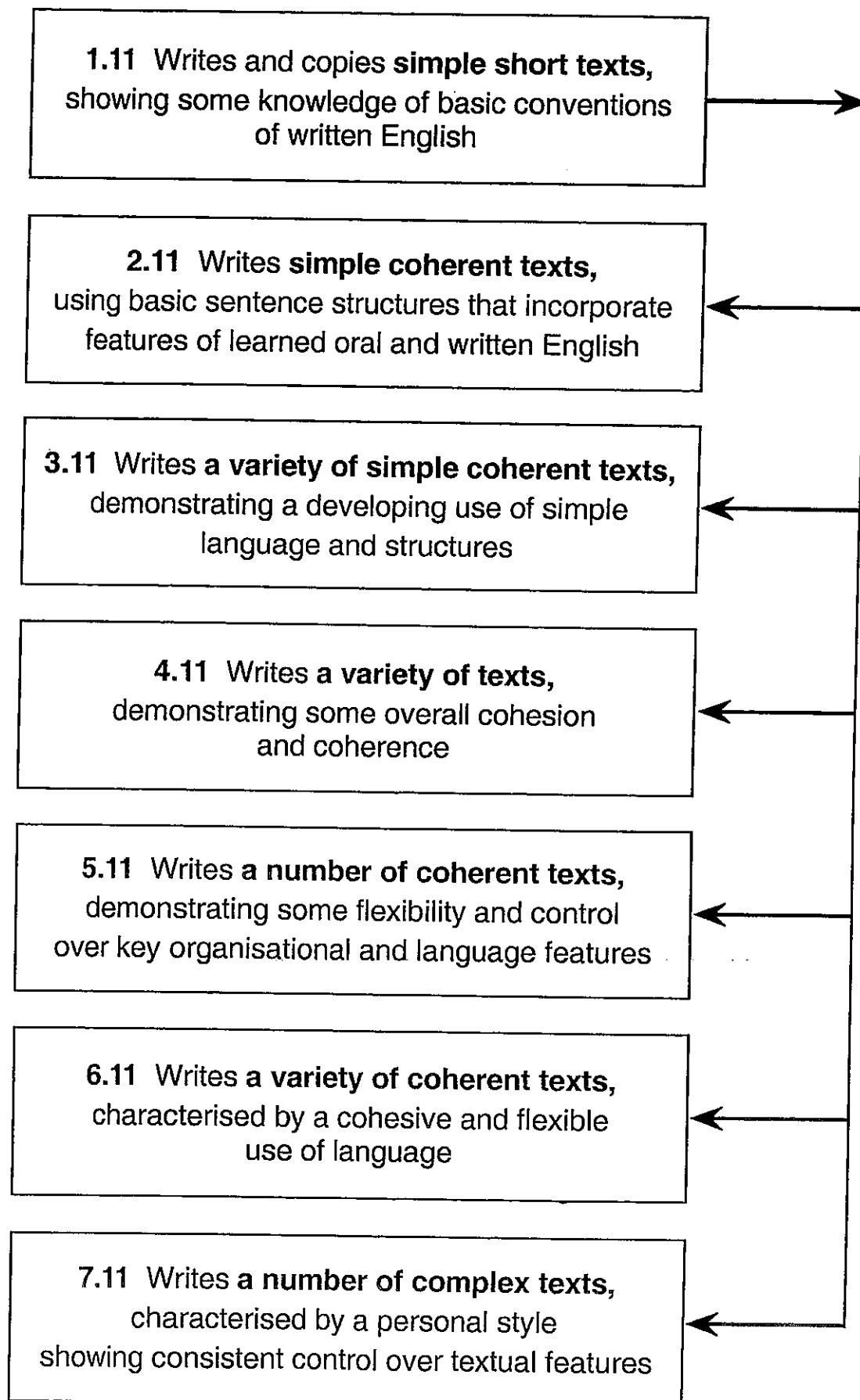
1	2	3
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ORAL INTERACTION	Band A			Band B			Band C	
Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Language and Cultural Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Language Structures and Features	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Strategies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

READING AND RESPONDING	Band A1			Band A			Band B		Band C	
Communication	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language and Cultural Understanding	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language Structures and Features	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strategies	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

WRITING	Band A1			Band A			Band B		Band C	
Communication	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language and Cultural Understanding	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Language Structures and Features	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strategies	B1	B2	B3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ESL STUDENT WRITING OUTCOMES



STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ON ESL SCALES — WRITING

[illegible]

INFORMATION REPORT WRITING — YEAR 2

Student name: _____	Class: _____
Name of report: <i>e.g. Animal</i>	
Teacher signature: _____	Date: _____

English K-6 Outcomes: (What I am trying to achieve)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can write a brief factual text including some related ideas on a topic that is familiar to me, e.g. Australian animals. 2.15B I can use a word-processing program to write my texts. I can usually attempt to spell words using my knowledge of sounds/symbols patterns. I can write some basic sentence structures with language features so my ideas can be read and understood by others.

ESL Outcomes: (What I am trying to do with English language)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can write about my ideas and about the things I do, using limited written and spoken English. I know that information is presented in a particular way when I write in English, e.g. I separate my ideas with full stops. I can write simple, coherent texts using basic sentence structures and using what I have learnt about spoken and written English. I know a lot of ways to use English to write a coherent text, e.g. talk to the teacher before I write ... sound out words ... use a dictionary.

Legend

R: I can do this by myself	B: I need help to do this
D: Developing ... I am beginning to do this	M: Mastery ... I can do this very well

What I can do	Student Assess R, B, D, M	Teacher Comment
I know why reports are written		
I can select a book that has information in it		
I know that a fact is something that is true		
I can find my own information using contents and index pages		
I can make my own notes from books, videos and computers		
I can organise my notes logically, using a proforma		
I know how to classify animals into categories, e.g. mammals, reptiles, birds, big cats, wild animals		
I can put information into appropriate categories, e.g. diet, habitat, appearance		
I know how to structure a report (orally and written)		
I need to talk about English before I write it		
I can write in full sentences		
I can usually use the correct pronouns, e.g. it, they		
I can use simple describing words, e.g. the fur is soft		
I can use correct sentence structure		
I can identify and use some technical words, e.g. pouch, marsupial, endangered		
I can find the correct spelling of words I need		
I know the correct grammar to use, e.g. tenses		
I can use capital letters and full stops correctly		
I can check my work and correct some errors		
I can publish my work in a neat simple manner		

INFORMATION REPORT WRITING — YEAR 4

Student name: _____	Class: _____
Name of report: <i>e.g. Animal</i>	
Teacher signature: _____	Date: _____

English K-6 Outcomes: (What I am trying to achieve)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can write a brief factual text which includes information on a number of aspects of a topic I know, e.g. animals. 3.15 I can write clearly most of the time and am beginning to use a word-processing program to write my texts. I am beginning to plan my work and to revise it while I am writing so that the meaning is clearer. I can usually attempt to write new words and can spell many common words. 3.18 I can write basic sentence structures for an information report so my ideas can be read and understood by others.

ESL Outcomes: (What I am trying to do with English language)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can write a simple informational text on a given topic in class. 3.10 I am beginning to know that the texts I write in class have a certain format, e.g. reports have separate sections for classification, appearance, habitat, behaviour etc. I can write a variety of simple, coherent texts using basic sentence structures and my usage of language and sentence structure is developing. 3.12 I know a lot of ways to use English to write a coherent text, e.g. talk to the teacher before I write ... sound out words ... use a dictionary.

Legend

R: I can do this by myself	B: I need help to do this
D: Developing ... I am beginning to do this	M: Mastery ... I can do this very well

	Student Assess	Teacher Comment
What I can do	R, B, D, M	
I know why reports are written		
I can find my own information using contents and index pages in books		
I can find my own information using a computer		
I can make my own notes		
I can organise my notes logically, using a proforma		
I know how to classify animals into categories, e.g. mammals, reptiles, birds, big cats, wild animals		
I can put my information into appropriate categories, e.g. diet, habitat, appearance		
I know the correct words to use in an information report		
I can identify and use some technical words, e.g. illegal, predators, matriarch		
I can identify key words, e.g. noun groups/verbs etc.		
I am beginning to recognise and use topic sentences		
I know how to structure a report (orally and written)		
I need to talk about English before I write		
I can use correct sentence structure in most of my writing		
I can write more complex sentences using joining words like: because, so, since, usually		
I can use comparisons to expand my descriptions, e.g. as big as, heavier than, it looks like an enormous...		
I know the correct grammar to use in an information report		
I can use capital letters and punctuation appropriately		
I can check my work and correct some errors		
I can sum up my thoughts by adding a concluding statement		
I can publish my work in a variety of neat, attractive ways.		

INFORMATION REPORT WRITING — STAGE 1

Student name: _____	Class: _____
Name of report: <u>e.g. Animal</u>	
Teacher signature: _____	Date: _____

English K-6 Outcomes: (What I am trying to achieve)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.13 I am beginning to know that some texts give information and I can talk about them sometimes. 1.15 I can write words that other people can read, moving left to right and leaving spaces between words. 1.16 I am beginning to use charts and picture books to get ideas for my writing and I ask for help when I need it. I can use letter sounds to help me spell new words and I can spell some common words myself. I can copy words well. I can label drawings and write ideas using the correct words for my topic. I can join ideas using 'and'.

ESL Outcomes: (What I am trying to do with English language)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can label pictures, write simple words and copy simple sentences using the English I have learnt. I know that writing is important at school and that my writing will be read by others just as it is in my first language. I can write simple sentences from left to right, leaving spaces between words and some punctuation, e.g. full stops, capital letters and question marks. 1.12 I know a lot of ways to help me write in English. I can spell some words, sound some words, find words on charts and in books, write some sentences by myself and am beginning to read my sentences to myself to see if they are correct. I often talk to the teacher before I write my sentences.

Legend

R: I can do this by myself	B: I need help to do this
D: Developing ... I am beginning to do this	M: Mastery ... I can do this very well

What I can do	Student Assess	Teacher Comment
I know that some books give me information when they are read to me (1.6)	R, B, D, M	
I can find some information using picture books and videos		
I can draw and label pictures (1.9)		
I can put my ideas on a proforma (2.10)		
I can use some correct sentence structures in spoken reports (2.11)		
I know that information reports are not about my experiences		
I know how to classify things into simple family groups, e.g. animals, birds, insects		
I am beginning to talk about the features of animals, e.g. appearance, food, homes, babies (2.11)		
I can talk about and write at least three relevant facts		
I need to talk about English sentences before I write them		
I can read my writing back to someone		
I always write from left to right (1.11)		
I can sound out some new words (1.12)		
I can find the words I need on charts or word lists (1.12)		
I can join sentences using 'and' (2.11)		
I usually use capital letters and full stops (1.11)		
I like to see my work displayed in the room		